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**THE ORPHANED CORE OBJECTIVE OF  
*A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY FOR A NEW CENTURY***

JOEL SHAPIRO/CLASS OF 1998  
COURSE NUMBER 5601  
FUNDAMENTALS OF STATECRAFT  
SEMINAR O

FACULTY SEMINAR LEADER  
COL Richard Saunders

FACULTY ADVISOR  
Jim Stefan

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The yearly versions of the *National Security Strategy* act like viruses. While there are some continuities in their behavior, viruses display unpredictable immunity to antibiotics. Last year's antibiotic of choice to battle an infection may not work this year. From 1996 to 1997 the *National Security Strategy* developed a curious immunity to promoting democracy. If the function of the *National Security Strategy* exercise, aside from fulfilling a Congressional mandate, is to articulate American interests and tell the Administration's foreign policy story, then downplaying democracy leaves out an important character in the Administration's narrative. However, a reemphasis of democracy can be made to fit well with other key national security priorities.

A core objective of 1996's *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* was the promotion of democracy abroad, that document then provided pages of specific incidents and approaches to developing and ensuring democracy throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> While 1997's *A National Security Strategy for a New Century (NSS)*<sup>2</sup> maintains that promotion of democracy abroad still remains a core objective, it then proceeds to ignore the issue as best it can, with barely more than a single page of elaboration in the text. Even in its detailed regional discussions, the *NSS* gingerly describes promoting democracy only with the most general language, much like dealing with an alcoholic uncle at a wedding: he must be invited but is seated behind the potted plant so he won't embarrass the bride or groom or cause a scene.

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<sup>1</sup> *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 1996), I, 2-4, 8-10.

This downgrading of democracy does not respond to what most Americans would see as a core value, i.e., America's mission in the world as a great example and promoter of the democratic ideal. While clearly a Wilsonian idea, it also resonates from the beginning of the republic when Jefferson said that "our interests will ever be found inseparable from our moral duties."<sup>3</sup>

Instead, a large portion of the *NSS* focuses on enhancing America's economic prosperity through international trade. Ensuring American access to foreign markets and improving the global economic climate for the U.S. are important to American prosperity and cannot be ignored. Both Congress and the public are deeply interested in job creation, especially export-driven jobs which tend to pay well. Moreover, the famous slogan of Clinton's 1992 campaign was "It's the economy, stupid!"<sup>4</sup>

However, ignoring democracy robs the *NSS* of its power in the retailing of foreign policy. The absence of a strong thrust regarding democracy leaves a rather bloodless strategy that may be less than inspirational to the American public and to Congress, which has to back the Administration's national security strategy and foreign policy with tax dollars. It thus remains a policy paper that would make an international economist's heart sing (assuming economists have hearts). While undoubtedly important, changes in the World Trade Organization, market access agreements, and scintillating issues like the Trade

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<sup>2</sup> *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Josef Joffe, "'Bismarck' or 'Britain'? Toward an American Grand Strategy After Bipolarity," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (Spring 1995), 94.

Promotion Coordination Committee will not be seen as rallying cries for national sacrifice<sup>5</sup> Or, as a CIA agent said a few years ago, when the issue arose of supplying clandestine international economic intelligence to American businesses, "I'm willing to die for my country but not for General Mills"<sup>6</sup>

There are various possible reasons for democracy's back seat in this year's *NSS*. First, there is the Administration's understanding that after recent budget cutting deals, a parsimonious Congress will provide less money for promotion of democracy than even the inadequate amounts of previous years. Second, there is the realization that building democracy is hard (e.g., Haiti and Bosnia are pacified but not democratic), the sad fact that there have been fewer obvious successes in the past years reinforces this—the triumph of democracy in Eastern Europe is no longer a new story. Third, there is probably the desire to divorce the issue of human rights from economic and other U.S. strategic goals.

This last point is evident in the *NSS*'s discussion of China and similar important regional interlocutors.<sup>7</sup> The brief China discussion rightly notes that the "overarching U.S. interest is China's emergence as a stable, open secure, and peaceful state."<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the *NSS* refuses even to use "democratic" as an adjective to describe the kind of state we want in the future for China.

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<sup>4</sup> The *NSS* also focuses on arms control, proliferation, transnational threats and the traditional elements of a national strategy, i.e., a strong military and maintaining our various alliances. While important, these other aspects are not the focus of this paper.

<sup>5</sup> *NSS*, 15-17.

<sup>6</sup> Terry Diebel makes the point in his discussion about "globalizing American values" that "statesmen know how difficult it is to sustain public support for any policy—especially one demanding sacrifice—without an element of idealism. Whatever he might believe, no president ever told the American people that he was leading them to war to preserve the balance of power." See his "Strategies Before Containment: Patterns for the Future," *International Security* 16, no. 4 (Spring 1992), 94.

The NSS does clearly argue against the view espoused by unnamed Asian states (actually China and Singapore) that “democracy is unsuited for Asia” but then notes that “each nation must find its own form of democracy But there is no cultural justification for tyranny, torture or the denial of fundamental freedoms ” Most tellingly, the text cites no specific culprit The NSS’s only statement about democracy in China is hidden in a bullet that says the U S will “pursue a constructive, goal-oriented approach to achieving progress on human rights and rule of law issues with China ”<sup>9</sup> Human rights in China get no more space than Indonesia and East Timor Even the separate discussions on adherence to human rights and humanitarian assistance do not specifically mention important trading partners like China or Indonesia This NSS timidity makes it clear that the Administration will no longer hold trading relationships of important regional actors hostage to their internal political behavior

The Administration’s case could be strengthened by connecting democratization with its emphasis on international trade Only once does the NSS express awareness of this complex relationship, when it refers to the response to a Paraguayan coup attempt The coup opposition led by Southern Cone Common Market members “demonstrated the degree to which our democracy and economic integration agendas have become mutually reinforcing ”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> NSS, 24

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> All quotations in this paragraph in *ibid* , 25

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* , 23-24

One way democracies have evolved is precisely by developing economies that follow the liberal pattern that the U S has supported since World War II In a slow process, through trade and contact, middle classes have been created throughout the world and in turn have demanded political rights from their governments to defend their property and lives Historically, democracy in the West developed out of economic rights The pattern can be reversed--in Eastern Europe and the NIS, market economies are developing as the result of the reestablishment of democracy—or perhaps the older traditions have reasserted themselves after being suppressed for many years

The NSS should, therefore, be making a clear case that economic openness and trading by the rules established by the world's liberal democracies fifty years ago will lead to democracy elsewhere in the long term For example, now that China has allowed private property, increased trade and foreign investment is developing a new Chinese middle class There are clear signs the power and rationale of the communist party is slowly being eroded This does not mean that free-market, middle class Chinese will automatically be pro-U S , but it will lessen the chances that they will be automatically anti-U S

Alternatively, the NSS could make a stronger pitch for enlargement, as the push for world democracy was called last year, precisely because democracies will likely engage in free trade, which we want

Thus, in the battle for ideas, the NSS is shortchanging the moralism of the American people and losing an opportunity to push its major economic ideas and make them sound idealistic at the same time